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ABSTRACT

It is not possible to outline a "system" of education which could be applied to all children with language handicaps. Each child with a language deviation will provide his own model and his own system of educational needs based upon the extent to which he is atypical in his language development. The disadvantaged child lacks the language facility which is necessary for independent thinking and problem solving; along with vocabulary and grammar, the child must be taught how to manipulate words into meaningful thought processes. Several learning activities are discussed here. (Author/VM)

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SOME IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON NORMAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD

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SOME IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON NORMAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED CHILD

The major educational problem confronting the disadvantaged child is one of language. The families of these children do not engage in discussions or language training that would stimulate conceptual thinking and vocabulary growth. (11)

Aside from the fact that many disadvantaged children come from predominantly non-verbal environments, they also may have learned how not to listen. The noise level in a three or four room home with seven or eight people living there may be so high that a child learns from infancy to block out auditory stimuli. (7) These auditory patterns which the child deprives himself of are necessary for language development.

It is not possible to outline a "system" of education which could be applied to all children with language handicaps. It is not feasible to provide teachers with specific and foolproof recipes. Each child with a language deviation will provide his own model and his own system of educational needs based upon the extent to which he is atypical in his language development. Insightful teaching of these children must always come after the child has been helped to a stage where it is reasonable to expect him to learn. (8)

The expressive language of the disadvantaged child may present a variety of problems. Their pronunciation and articulation, vocabulary, sentence length as well as use of grammar and syntax resemble the language of "normal" children of a younger age group. (12) There is a wide variety of opinion on exactly how delayed the language of the disadvantaged child is, but most researchers, such as Worley (14), agree that there is at least one year of delay. It is the opinion of the author that this delay in language varies in degree with these children and thus, they must be considered as individuals rather than a group when planning a specific therapy program.

It is also a predominant characteristic of the majority of disadvantaged children that they lack the language facility which is necessary for independent thinking and problem solving. (12) Their deficit in language facility hampers the

development of concepts. Our educational program today is based on conceptual learning and therefore, the disadvantaged child needs specific instruction in this area as well as in the area of language. It is not enough to teach only vocabulary and grammar. The child must be taught how to manipulate words into meaningful thought processes.

Having mentioned some of the specific language problems of the disadvantaged child, the question remains as to how to go about providing the necessary solutions.

Bereiter and Engelmann (3) developed their program of language stimulation around teaching the child to reason; to use logical thinking as a means of processing information. Their first step is to have instruction in formal, structured situations, and then extend it into social situations. In this particular program, the child is taught language to name an object, to create a symbolic equivalent of what is observable about the object, and to indicate positive and negative. For example, the child learns "This is a block." Then he learns "The block is red." Finally, he learns "This is a block. This is not a block."

There are four levels of lessons involved in the Bereiter-Engelmann program. The first level is non-verbal and the child is taught to point to a specific object as it is named. The second level involves one word responses of "yes" or "no" in answer to questions posed by the teacher. The third level is concerned with repeating the basic statement as an answer, e.g., the teacher asks if the block is red and the child answers "Yes, the block is red." The final level is one in which the child must identify without any directions, e.g., the teacher says "Tell me about the block."

Through this method of teaching the child is supposed to develop the skills necessary for thinking, reasoning, understanding, and making use of formal language.

According to Barbara Biber, childhood education specialist, (4), informal language training as well can be of great value. The disadvantaged child needs to explore the world around him with guidance. He needs to have the opportunity to engage in gross motor activities such as climbing a tree or playing on a jungle

gym. The purpose of this is not merely for better coordination but also so that they may learn such things as relative size, weight, pressure, leverage, etc. They need to become more sensitive to the world in which we live. This may be achieved in or out of the therapy room. The child must be made more aware of things he may have been exposed to but overlooked, such as the tactile differences of soft, hard, rough, and smooth. This also includes learning differences in size, shape, and color. Musical instruments are very useful in training gross auditory discrimination, pitch, and rhythm.

From gross motor we move to some more fine motor activities. The child might build things out of blocks. All the while the child is engaged in an activity, the therapist should make use of language. She should talk about what the child is doing and ask specific questions. The child might also engage in coloring in varied shapes such as a circle, square, etc.

In order to teach the child to reproduce and symbolize, he might be asked to act out an activity he has experienced. Another technique which might be utilized is to pretend while playing house with miniaturized household furniture and objects. Thus, the child may relate the actual object and function with a symbol.

Language is a major tool for dealing symbolically with experiences, mastering the number system, and problem-solving as well as readiness for writing. The child must learn to organize his thoughts and the meaning of things in the world with words. Objects have names, uses, size, shapes and colors that are related to each other. The child must learn to classify and group things in many ways. He must learn that some things may be the same and yet different at the same time, such as his father is also a husband to his mother or a terrier and a collie look different but they are both dogs. By teaching the child this, hopefully, he will begin to understand the important concept that things can change from being one thing to another.

Specific techniques such as matching, sorting, organizing and naming are an important part of therapy for the disadvantaged child. However, it should be kept in mind that these processes are best stimulated while the activity is being carried out. For example, when a child shows a picture he has colored, the therapist should respond with "That's a nice red picture," thus helping him with naming colors.

Another valuable technique is to ask questions which point out comparisons, such as upon viewing two buildings built from blocks, the therapist might ask "Which building is taller?".

It is important to remember that any young child is concerned mainly with himself. Therefore, classroom activities will be more successful when they are directly related to the child and his particular interests.

CONCLUSION

The techniques suggested for helping the disadvantaged child are suggested in this paper strikingly like those used for children we now label as language delayed. This is true. One of the major problems of the disadvantaged child is a delay in language and it is the opinion of this author that the difference between these two groups is mainly one of semantics. This paper has not been concerned with another major problem of the disadvantaged child. This is the problem of their lack of facility in speaking what we now call "standard English." The reason for this subject not being included is that there is currently much debate over whether these children should be taught standard English, should be taught in their own dialect, or should be "bi-lingual." In light of this current debate, it was felt that that subject would involve another separate paper. It was assumed for purposes of this paper that any of the three above-mentioned means of speaking could be substituted but the underlying concepts would remain the same.

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